

Essay Review

FATEME KESHAVARZ: *A descriptive and analytical catalogue of Persian manuscripts in the Library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine*, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1986, 4to, pp. 705, illus., £35.00, \$55.00.

The investigation of Persian medicine in the Islamic period is still in its beginnings. Much of the source material spread in many libraries has still to be catalogued and evaluated before a substantial survey reaching the standard of Manfred Ullmann's *Die Medizin im Islam*—which, despite its comprehensive title, deals with Arabic medicine exclusively—can be hoped for. At the present moment this catalogue seems to be only the second of its kind, after Richter-Bernburg's 1978 catalogue of the Persian medical manuscripts at the University of California, Los Angeles, of which Dr Keshavarz made ample use.

The general idea one has been able to form so far is that Persian medicine was hardly more than an epigonal continuation of Arabic medicine. The latter was, according to Ullmann, mainly a renaissance of Greek medicine with only a few sporadic contributions of its own, its main merit lying in the systematization of the inherited knowledge. This impression as to the general nature of Persian medicine is probably correct, but it needs to be verified and, if necessary, modified by detailed source studies. The cataloguing of manuscripts is one preliminary, but important step on the way to this goal. It is, therefore, to be welcomed that Dr Keshavarz has undertaken the difficult task of writing a catalogue of the large collection of Persian manuscripts in the Library of the Wellcome Institute, the bulk of which is, in fact, medical.

In her interesting introduction, the author presents a general survey of the collection, giving prominence to a number of particularly valuable texts and the illustrated manuscripts. Even though it becomes evident from these pages that her main interests are literature and Sufism, the history of sciences is not neglected. By a skilful choice of names and subjects, a general idea of the dimensions and the value of this precious collection is outlined for the reader. A short, but enlightening excursus is included on one of the non-medical manuscripts, the *Tuhfat al-'Irāqayn* by Khāqānī. This text, a versified description of the author's pilgrimage to Mecca, is shown to be a remarkable piece of *poesia docta*, containing about 120 references to medical matters. On the other hand, an important aspect of medicine in Islam, the so-called "prophetic medicine", is not discussed; and the short mention of "mystical, or quasi-magical activities including numerology, letter exercises, ('ilm-i hurūf or 'ilm-i jafr), techniques of prognostication (e.g. 'ilm-i raml), and the construction of talismans and amulets", ranging them with modern "therapy by suggestion or para-psychology" (p. 27) is no more than a hint of how and by what competence this complicated problem could, and should, be broached.

In the catalogue, the author describes more than 600 manuscripts covering a vast variety of fields—from medicine, mathematics, and magic to Sufism, rhetoric, and music—and an epoch of nine centuries. The classification of this material was a major task, and this has been handled very diligently by the author. Thus her subject classification for medicine is very detailed: under such larger subdivisions as "diagnosis", "therapy", and "anatomy" are subheadings such as those under "therapy": local and general diseases, general diseases, fevers, sexual disorders, venereal diseases, sexual hygiene, gynaecology and paediatrics, local diseases.

Every manuscript is described according to a standard pattern including the title; author's name; contents; features of the manuscript or, in some cases, several manuscripts of one text, sometimes numbering up to ten or more; then the incipit and excipit, followed by some indications as to if, and where, other manuscripts of this text exist. The descriptions of the external features of each manuscript include all the peculiarities usually mentioned in a catalogue of this standard such as size, kind of paper, dating, damage, flyleaves, etc. The titles are given in Arabic script and Roman transliterations; unfortunately they are not translated. The authors are identified with the help of reference works (Browne, Richter-Bernburg, Rieu, Storey,

etc.). The content is briefly and often concisely, but sometimes too vaguely, summarized. Occasionally, the titles of chapters or sections are indicated, but in most cases a full listing of the chapter headings is not given, certainly due to considerations of space.

The value of the catalogue is enhanced by two glossaries and six indexes, as well as by ten plates, seven of them in colour.

It is admirable that the author, although primarily interested in fictional literature, should have embarked on the description of manuscripts dealing with philosophy, medicine, and other natural sciences and managed to tackle the task, despite some shortcomings which I shall mention below. She was even able to correct errors committed by other scholars and to suggest ascriptions of works to probable authors; her identification of a number of translations from Sanskrit and other Indian languages is also noteworthy.

The impressive size of this catalogue, its neat presentation, and the considerable amount of knowledge and enormous diligence it displays make it a highly meritorious achievement, particularly in view of the youth of the author and her not being a trained medical historian. It is only natural that such work should leave some wishes unfulfilled. In listing them, I do not wish to diminish the catalogue's indisputable qualities.

First of all, one would have wished to read some significant quotations here and there aside from the in- and excipits; important as they are for the identification of the manuscript, they yield little or no information as to the scientific value of the text. Likewise, references to related Arabic medical works are missing in cases where one is curious to know if such relations exist. Further questions arise in connection with particular items:

(no. 61) Is the *Kitāb ar-Rahmah fī al-ṭibb wa-al-ḥikmah* really the translation of an anonymous Arabic work, or is it perhaps related to Muhammad ibn 'Alī aṣ-Ṣanaubari's (d. AH 815/AD1412) *Kitāb ar-Rahmah*, a work on medicine strongly infiltrated by Prophetic medicine (mentioned by A. Dietrich in his *Medicinalia arabica*, item 96)? The title of the Persian translation suggests, at any rate, that this is a work on Prophetic medicine, but in her short indication of the content the author makes no reference in this direction.

(no. 66) Is there a connection between such texts as the *Mu'ālajāt-i jadvaliyah* and Ibn Butlān's *Taqwīm aṣ-ṣiḥḥah*?

(no. 70) What are the "mental problems" treated in *Muntakhab-i davā' al-Hind*; and has the content a definable Indian provenance or is it related to the Greek-Islamic strand of psychotherapy?

(no. 244) In what sense is the *Tālī'nāmah*, containing "a collection of horoscopes for men and women in separate sections arranged according to the signs of the zodiac", and attributed to Galen, affiliated to any Galenic tradition?

(no. 364) Which occult practice is meant by *jastan-i a'zā'* ("leaping of the limbs"), mentioned in a treatise on "foretelling the future" through various devices?

How—if at all!—are the two texts attributed to Aristotle, (no. 191, *Faras'nāmah*, a book on horses, and no. 216, *Risālah-i Mā Bāl*, a book of medical questions and answers) linked with the Arabic tradition of Aristotelianism in medieval Islam? The information given by the author that *Mā Bāl* was "translated from the Greek *Problemata*" only enhances the reader's curiosity: is this a direct Persian translation from the Greek? Do such translations exist, at all? Or was it made from an Arabic version, and would a comparison with the version made by Hunayn (cf. Ullmann, item 93) lead to a definite answer?

(no. 268, p. 443) One of the flyleaves in this manuscript contains "notes on the medical properties of the various organs of elephants attributed to Galen". If this is an authentic attribution, which I am unable to check at present, it strikes me as curious that Galen should have been an authority for the medical properties of elephants rather than an Indian scholar!

It would, however, certainly be unfair to expect such questions to be answered in a catalogue whose purpose is to list and classify the material. In what follows I make some minor corrections and suggestions for possible emendations:

page 20: Read mu'ālajah instead of mu'ālijah.

no. 54: Instead of mushakkikīn read probably mutashakkikīn, for reasons of lexicography and of analogy. The two titles mentioned in this item are evidently constructed after the same pattern: since one title is Ta'dīb al-muta'aṣṣibīn, the other should be Tanbīh al-mutashakkikīn. In the incipit of this item the Arabic is incorrect. Instead of širāṭ al-mustaqīm and maslak al-qawīm it should be aṣ-širāṭ al-mustaqīm and al-maslak al-qawīm.

no. 62: At the end of this item a quotation is announced, but has not been inserted.

no. 74: The obscure author Luqmān (-i) Ḥakīm Ṣāhib is in all likelihood the Koranic Luqmān. The reader might have been referred to no. 202, where the same "author" occurs, this time with the title "ḥaḍrat", used for prophets and saints. To attribute medical knowledge to a Koranic figure, where in former times one would perhaps have attributed it to such mythic figures as Hermes or Agathodaimon, seems to me a fine example of Islamization. In the index of authors, no. 74 should be added under "Luqmān".

no. 123: Read, probably, qātil al-abdān instead of qāyil al-abdān in the last line of "Content".

no. 216: The title Risālah-i Mā Bāl is probably derived from the Arabic mā bālu fulān: "What is the state of, how feels so-and-so". But I doubt if this will be clear to many users of the catalogue.

no. 235: I do not understand the meaning of "jūtish".

no. 460: Instead of Gānākā kitāb, the transcription should rather be Gāna kā kitāb, which is Urdu and means "book of singing". This corresponds exactly with the content of this manuscript, "a collection of short lyrics in Panjābī, Kashmīrī, Urdu and predominantly Persian, each recommended to be sung in a certain Persian mode, *dastgāh*, or an Indian raga."

This is an excellent catalogue, even though it does not answer all the questions a specialist might ask, nor fulfil all the expectations a curious reader might foster. To have catalogued so many manuscripts in this clear, consistent, well-organized and scholarly form is a great achievement and a great service to scholars working in Islamic medical history and related fields.

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